

Article

State-Led Tourism Infrastructure and Rural Regeneration: The Case of the Costa da Morte Parador (Galicia, Spain)

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Abstract

Peripheral rural coastal areas in Europe face persistent structural challenges, including demographic decline, aging populations, and the collapse of traditional sectors like fishing. These are further aggravated by environmental disasters, which weaken local economies. Public sector intervention is therefore essential, not only to provide an immediate response, but also to guarantee long-term solutions. This study explores the contribution of state-led tourism infrastructures to rural development and post-disaster recovery, taking the Parador Costa da Morte in Galicia as a case study. Based on data from a survey of parador guests, it identifies tourist profiles through factor and cluster motivation analysis. The parador's impacts on the surrounding region are assessed by examining tourists' travel patterns and spending behavior, as well as the analysis of secondary data on regional changes in tourism supply and demand. The results show widely differing motivations and, despite varying visitor profiles, the predominance of a tourism typology that generates significant local spillovers. These findings support the potential of high-quality, publicly driven tourism initiatives to stimulate the economy of structurally disadvantaged rural areas. The article ends with recommendations for tourism strategies aligned with local recovery and development goals.



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1. Introduction

This study focuses on the Costa da Morte (literally, “the Coast of Death”), a peripheral rural region that forms part of the European *finis terrae*, a term used to describe outlying areas that are economically less developed and geographically distant from the heart of “Old Europe” [1]. The history and myths associated with these regions have traditionally held a strong appeal for visitors [2]. The Costa da Morte runs along the coastline of Galicia, Spain, and owes its name to the considerable number of shipwrecks, sinkings, and maritime tragedies that have taken place off its shores. One of the most notorious was the sinking in 1890 of the British Royal Navy cruiser HMS *Serpent*, with just three survivors of the 176-strong crew [3,4]. The most recent catastrophe occurred in 2002, when a spill from the oil tanker *Prestige* resulted in one of Europe's largest environmental disasters [5].

In the wake of the *Prestige*, the Spanish government approved a package of aid and financial support measures (known collectively as “Plan Galicia”) to mitigate the short-term

consequences and to promote the mid- and long-term economic and social revitalization of the most severely affected areas. They included the construction of a hotel operated by the state-owned company Paradores de Turismo de España in order to drive the region's socioeconomic development and improve its tourist image. Nearly twenty years after the spill, in June 2020, the Parador de Turismo de Costa da Morte officially opened.

There are several examples in Europe of the use of state-owned accommodation establishments as instruments for heritage recovery and tourism promotion, such as the Portuguese Pousadas, created to promote tourism while preserving the country's cultural and architectural heritage, and the Albergo Diffuso model in Italy, which revitalizes villages by offering dispersed accommodation in historic properties. However, the strategy behind the Spanish parador network is broader and also encompasses sustainable economic development through tourism [6–8].

Our study has a series of objectives: firstly, to examine the motivations of tourists staying at the Costa da Morte Parador; secondly, to analyze how tourist behavior varies according to these motivations; and finally, to assess the parador's impact on the surrounding region in two ways: (a) through an analysis of data from official statistical sources and (b) through an analysis of the behavior of tourists staying at the parador.

Scientific literature on Spain's network of paradors is relatively limited. Most studies focus on its impact on architectural heritage [9–11], while a smaller body of work analyzes the success factors behind the hotel chain [7,8,12]. However, we have been unable to locate any in-depth research into guest motivation or its effect on their behavior. Furthermore, few studies have explored the motivations of tourists visiting Galicia, and the Costa da Morte in particular, and the limited research that does exist mainly addresses motivations associated with the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route.

The originality of our study therefore lies in the in-depth analysis of the factors that attract tourists to visit the Costa da Morte and stay at the parador. Furthermore, it analyzes the behavior of various tourist profiles based on their motivations. Finally, it analyzes how these behavioral differences translate into broader regional impacts attributable to the parador.

2. Literature Review

Throughout history and across different geographical areas, it has become evident that the public sector has viewed tourism as an opportunity to drive economic growth, generate employment, and enhance the wellbeing of the population. This has resulted in public investment in tourism, such as support for major events [13] or funding for large-scale infrastructure projects such as football stadiums or Formula 1 circuits [14–16].

Tourism is also seen as a tool for economic diversification, population retention, mitigation of aging demographics, and job creation in rural areas [17,18]. In these rural contexts, it can contribute to the conservation of cultural heritage and traditions while offering tourists unique experiences [19–21].

Tourism has also been included in the EU's rural development policies. This has included funding for a significant number of projects under the LEADER initiative, implemented in the early 1990s, and the PRODER program [22–24]. The territory now known as A Costa da Morte (situated in northwestern Galicia, Spain) owes its name in part to the local action group Neria, established in 1992 to apply for funding under the EU's LEADER initiative [3]. A substantial portion of public spending allocated to rural tourism has been directed toward rural accommodation establishments [25,26].

Public spending on tourism in rural areas appears justified, as it contributes to the sustainable development of these spaces. Investments in tourism projects help to enhance the value of the natural environment and cultural heritage, and enhance the appeal of

these destinations, while also attracting new tourists [27]. Several studies also highlight the role of tourism in the socioeconomic diversification of small-scale producers in rural areas and call for greater public sector support [28]. At all events, numerous studies have emphasized the need for local community involvement, effective management, effective marketing strategies, and the implementation of responsible practices in order to ensure sustainable development in rural areas [21,29–34].

At the same time, rural tourism has benefited from rising numbers of travelers seeking to escape the hurried pace of modern life, interact socially, consume local products, and immerse themselves in the destination experience. Many authors associate this trend with slow tourism [35–37], whose origins lie in the Italian slow food movement [38]. Recent studies suggest that the sustainability of rural tourist destinations is closely linked to the characteristics of the visitors they attract [39]. It is clear that tourist motivation and choice of destination vary depending on the sociodemographic profile. Appreciation of these attributes also varies, and tourists display clearly differentiated patterns of behavior in the destination [40,41]. Slow tourists in particular tend to be environmentally aware, connect with local life, consume local products, and typically stay for longer periods [42–45].

Tourist motivation is shaped by both destination-related factors (pull factors) and visitor-related factors (push factors) [46–48]. Various studies have analyzed push motivations in rural areas and have grouped tourists accordingly. The tourist groups were assigned various labels, such as “active visitors”, “passive nature observers”, “inactive visitors”, and “summer family vacationers” [49]; “rural researchers and seekers of relaxation”, “excitement seekers”, “passive tourists”, and “family rural tourists” [50]; and “relaxation and hospitality tourists” and “local produce consumers” [44]. In these studies, each tourist group displayed differentiated profiles in terms of their sociodemographic characteristics and also different patterns of behavior in the destination.

Studies exploring tourist motivations in the case of Galicia have focused primarily on those related to the Camino de Santiago [51]. Likewise, the only specific study based on the Costa da Morte area we have identified is limited to tourists walking the Camino de Santiago to Finisterre and Muxía [52]. Both studies highlight the existence of various motivations among pilgrims. The case most closely related to our study is presented in the research conducted by Ref. [53], which examines tourist motivations in a rural inland area of Galicia where, as in our case, there is also a Parador. The authors identified two tourist profiles: “Family/Friends” and “Culture/Nature.” Both profiles exhibited clearly differentiated characteristics and behavior patterns.

Despite the general perception that tourists staying at paradores have mid-high purchasing power, are culturally motivated, and seek quality experiences, we found no evidence in the scientific literature to confirm these assumptions. Our study is therefore novel because it focuses on a geographical area and a type of accommodation for which very little information exists regarding tourists’ motivations and behavior in the destination.

3. Tourist Motivations and Impacts of the Parador Costa da Morte

The term “Costa da Morte” refers to one of the 26 geographical areas (geodestinos) that make up the autonomous community of Galicia, according to the regional government’s classification. Each tourist geodestino shares a series of differentiated and singular features associated with natural, heritage, and cultural resources [54]. The geodestino Costa da Morte comprises 17 municipalities located in the far west of the province of A Coruña, in Galicia, located in the northwest of Spain on the periphery of Europe, as shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1. Localization of Costa da Morte. Source: authors' own using ArcGIS pro.

3.1. The Costa da Morte Parador

Paradores de Turismo de España is a state-owned hotel chain founded in the early 20th century. The 1960s saw the rapid expansion in the number of properties, which rose from 20 in 1959 to 56 by 1968. Today, it operates 99 hotels located throughout Spain, and practically each of the country's 50 provinces has at least one parador [55].

Typically, paradores are hotels located in emblematic buildings or locations. The chain's mission can be summed up as follows: to stimulate the hotel sector (which was virtually nonexistent at the time the chain was founded); (b) to promote the value of Spain's artistic, cultural, and architectural heritage; and (c) to drive economic activity in depressed regions. This final objective reflects a broader strategy that sets the Spanish model apart from those adopted in other countries, such as Portugal's Pousadas Portuguesas [56,57], Italy's Albergo Diffuso model [58], or France's Monuments Historiques [59], which focus more closely on tourism promotion as well as the conservation of architecture and heritage [7,8].

The Parador Costa da Morte is located in the municipality of Muxía, a small, peripheral seafaring town with fewer than 5000 inhabitants. As shown in Table 1, Muxía is a rural municipality with a dispersed and aging population. Its population density stands at 36 inhabitants per km²—almost 59 inhabitants per km² lower than the national average. The average age of the population exceeds 53 years, nearly 9 years older than the national average, and the aging index (which compares the population aged 65 and over with that under 20) is almost three times higher than the national average. Economic indicators also point to a significant disadvantage compared to the national average. The GDP per capita is EUR 16,475, 30.9% below the Spanish average, and gross disposable income per capita is EUR 13,820, 41.6% lower than the national average [60,61].

Table 1. Socioeconomic indicators.

	Population	Population Density (pop./km ²)	Median Age	Aging Index **	GDP Per Capita (EUR)	Gross Disposable Income Per Capita (EUR)
Muxía (municipality)	4380	36.1	53.3	321.8	16,475	13,820
Costa da Morte (comarca)	11,1508	83.5	52.1	286.6	15,373	14,864
A Coruña (province)	1,128,320	141.9	48.0	166.1	23,113	18,296
Galicia (region)	2,703,353	91.5	48.4	172.8	21,755	17,169
España (country)	49,077,984	95.0	44.4	112.0	23,851	23,677
Difference Muxía/Spain		−163.2%	+20%	+187.3%	−30.9%	−41.6%
Difference Costa da Morte/Spain		−12.1%	+17.4%	+155.9%	−35.5%	−37.2%

** The aging index is calculated as the ratio between the population aged 65 years and over and the population under 20 years of age. The data on population, population density, median age, and aging index refer to the year 2024; the gross disposable income per capita to 2022; and GDP per capita to 2020. Source: [60,61] authors' own.

The broader Costa da Morte region also has a dispersed and aging population, as well as a lower standard of living compared to the province, the region, and Spain as a whole. The population is approximately 111,000, less than 10% of the total number of inhabitants in the province of A Coruña. The population density (83.5 inhabitants per km²) is below the average for the province, the region, and Spain overall. The average age in the region exceeds the national average by nearly 8 years, and the aging index is 2.6 times higher than that of Spain. Income indicators reflect the region's lower purchasing power, with GDP per capita and gross disposable income per capita standing at 35.5% and 37.2% below the national average, respectively.

3.2. Tourist Motivations

The data were collected via an anonymous, voluntary online questionnaire, accessible to hotel guests through a QR code made available during their stay. To be included in the sample, respondents had to have checked in at the hotel for at least one night. Day and occasional visitors to the parador were excluded from the sample. The questionnaire was available in both English and Spanish. The fieldwork was conducted between March and June 2024, and a total of 205 valid questionnaires were obtained.

In total, 44.4% of the respondents were male and 55.6% were female, with 89.3% reporting that they were either married or partnered. The average age was 49 years, with the largest group aged between 40 and 60 years. Respondents showed a high level of studies, with over 80% holding a university degree and nearly 35% having completed a master's or doctoral program. More than half of the respondents were salaried employees, while 17% were self-employed, and the remaining 16% fell into other categories, such as unemployed or economically inactive. The average monthly income was approximately EUR 2700, although there was significant variation among respondents: over 35% reported earning more than EUR 3000, while 21% earned less than EUR 1800. Nearly 70% of respondents had visited the region on previous occasions. Table 2 shows a detailed overview of the sample's sociodemographic characteristics.

Table 2. Tourist profiles.

	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	91	44.4
Female	114	55.6
<i>Age</i>		
Under 40	63	30.7
Between 40 and 60	83	40.5
60 and over	59	28.8
<i>Civil status</i>		
Single	22	10.7
Married or partnered	183	89.3
<i>Education</i>		
Junior and secondary	38	18.5
University studies	96	46.8
Master's and PhD degrees	71	34.6
<i>Current occupation</i>		
Salaried employee	120	58.5
Self-employed	34	16.6
Other circumstances	51	24.9
<i>Monthly income</i>		
Less than EUR 1800	43	21.0
Between EUR 1800 and EUR 3000	89	43.4
More than EUR 3000	73	35.6
<i>Experience</i>		
Repeat	141	68.8
First time	64	31.2

Source: authors' own.

Tourists' motivations were analyzed through a set of 22 items using a 7-point Likert-type scale, where 1 represented "not important at all" and 7 represented "extremely important". These items were selected from previous literature [42,43,51,62,63].

Six motivation items (consuming local products, searching for peace and tranquility, personal revitalization and self-enrichment, connecting with the local way of life, experiencing local customs, and visiting a non-crowded destination) obtained an average score of more than 5 points. Conversely, visiting the area as part of a longer trip in the autonomous community (traveling around Galicia, experiencing a simpler lifestyle, breaking monotony while spending little, and escaping the extreme heat of other places) scored lowest (below the central scale value). Figure 2 shows the average scores for all motivation items.

In order to simplify the dimensionality of the variables associated with tourist motivations, a factor analysis was conducted using the principal components method with Varimax rotation. The Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy yielded an excellent value of 0.922, while Bartlett's test of sphericity confirmed the presence of significant correlations among the variables ($p < 0.0005$). These results indicate optimal conditions for conducting factor analysis [64]. SPSS software (version 29.0) was used for statistical analyses.

The 22 motivation items were grouped into four factors with eigenvalues greater than one. All communalities exceeded 0.5, and all factor loadings were also above 0.5. Together, the four dimensions explained nearly 70% of the total variance. The analysis therefore meets the criteria suggested by Ref. [64] (pp. 122, 129): factor loadings equal to or greater than 0.50, eigenvalues equal to or more than one, and a factor solution explaining at least 60% of the total variance. The assignment of items to the four motivational dimensions was

based on the rotated component matrix, using Varimax rotation to facilitate interpretation. Each item was grouped under the factor where it exhibited the highest loading, provided that the loading exceeded 0.50 and there was no significant cross-loading. Cronbach's α for the four dimensions ranged between 0.79 and 0.92, indicating high internal consistency and clearly exceeding the commonly accepted threshold of 0.60 for exploratory research [65].

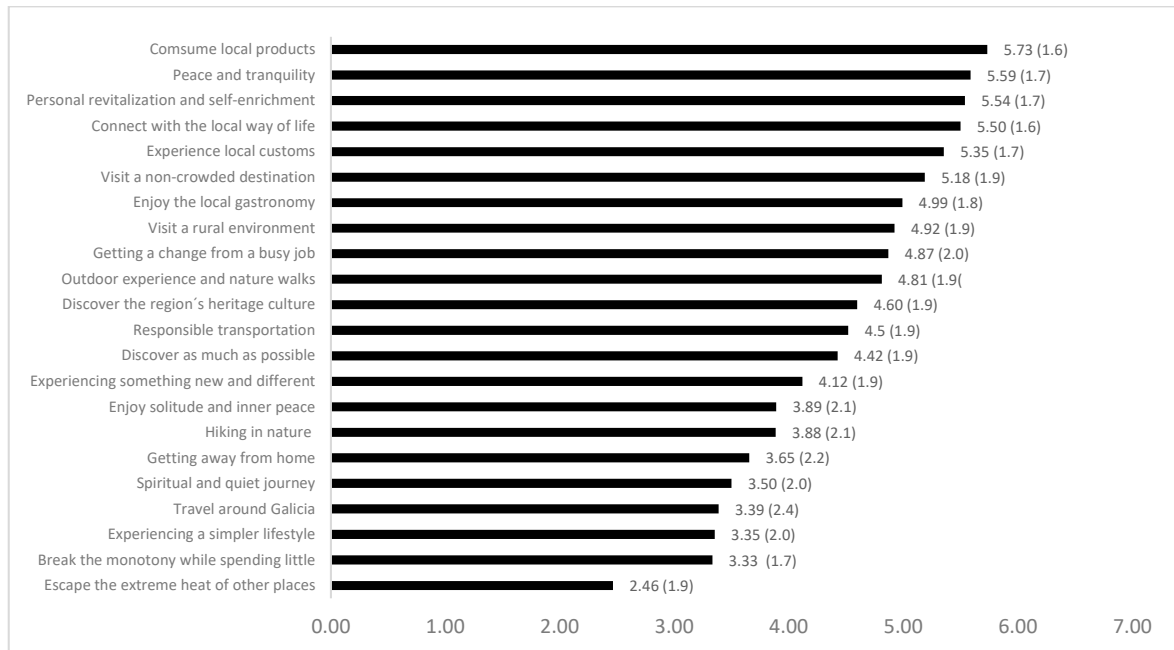


Figure 2. Motivations to visit the Costa da Morte. Mean (SD). Source: authors' own.

Factor 1 accumulated the largest share of variance (22.5%), with a 0.92 reliability coefficient, indicative of very high internal consistency. This factor reflects a tourist profile characterized by a strong preference for immersive and responsible travel experiences. Tourists express a clear interest in connecting with the local way of life, engaging in cultural customs, and supporting local economies through the consumption of locally produced goods. They also prioritize personal wellbeing and seek peace and tranquility when traveling. Furthermore, they demonstrate a clear awareness of environmental and social responsibility by favoring sustainable means of transport. We have termed this motivational factor “ethical immersion”.

Factor 2 explained 18.3% of the variance in the data and comprised five items: three related to the search for solitude, inner peace, and tranquility, and two reflecting the need for escape and detachment from domestic or work-related routines. We classified this motivation as “inner peace and escape”.

In turn, factor 3 explained 18% of the variance and included seven items related to hiking in nature, enjoying the local gastronomy and rural environment, and touring and exploring various sites in the region. We called this motivation “rural nature and heritage”.

Finally, factor 4, which we identified as “new experiences”, explained 11% of the data variance and included a more mixed set of factors, ranging from the need for a break from routine without overspending to the need to escape the heat of other areas. Despite this diversity, the internal consistence was high (0.8), particularly in terms of motivational items related to the desire or need to see, discover, or experience something new and different.

The results reveal a wide variety of motivations among tourists visiting the region but suggest that “ethical immersion” ($M = 5.4$) and “rural nature and heritage” ($M = 4.5$) are the most prominent motivational factors. “Inner peace and escape” ($M = 3.9$) and “new experiences” ($M = 3.6$) showed the lowest average scores, as shown in Table 3. It appears

that the principal motivations for tourists staying at the Parador Costa da Morte include the enjoyment of a slower pace, appreciation of local resources and products, and the desire for direct contact with nature and routes to discover heritage and the local gastronomy.

Table 3. Factor loadings and reliability for tourist motivations at the Costa da Morte Parador.

Factors and Items	Mean	Factor Loading	% of Variance	Cronbach's Alpha
F1: Ethical Immersion	5.4		22.5	0.92
Connecting with the local way of life		0.87		
Willingness to consume local products		0.86		
Experiencing local customs		0.85		
Personal revitalization and self-enrichment		0.77		
Peace and tranquility		0.76		
Responsible transportation		0.67		
F2: Inner Peace and Escape	3.9		18.3	0.89
Enjoying solitude and inner peace		0.86		
Spiritual and quiet journey		0.82		
Getting away from home		0.76		
Experiencing a simpler lifestyle		0.71		
Getting a change from a busy job		0.58		
F3: Rural Nature and Heritage	4.5		17.9	0.90
Hiking in nature		0.79		
Enjoying the local gastronomy		0.71		
Visiting a rural environment		0.67		
Outdoor experience and nature walks		0.64		
Visiting a non-crowded destination		0.63		
Traveling around Galicia		0.58		
Discovering the region's heritage culture		0.55		
F4: New Experiences	3.6		11.0	0.79
Experiencing something new and different		0.76		
Breaking the monotony while spending little		0.65		
Discovering as much as possible		0.63		
Escaping the extreme heat of other places		0.50		

KMO: 0.922; χ^2 : 3456.8; fd: 231; sig.: 0.000. Source: authors' own.

In order to obtain a deeper insight into tourist motivation, a cluster analysis was conducted based on visitors' perception of the four factors described above. Cluster analysis was selected because it is an appropriate exploratory technique for identifying homogeneous subgroups within a heterogeneous population based on tourists' motivations. This method enables data-driven segmentation without prior assumptions about group structure. Moreover, cluster analysis is widely used in tourism research to identify visitor profiles and behavioral patterns, making it a well-established and suitable approach for the objectives of this study [44,49,50]. SPSS software (version 29.0) was used for the data analysis. A hierarchical cluster analysis, using Ward's method and the squared Euclidean distance, was carried out to identify homogeneous groups of tourists based on motivation.

The analysis cluster enabled us to identify four groups of tourists. Groups 1 and 2 are similar in size and together accounted for more than 70% of the sample. Groups 3 and 4 constituted 20% and 9% of the cases, respectively. As Tables 4 and 5 show, statistically significant differences were found among the clusters regarding tourist motivation, sociodemographic profile, average daily expenditure, number of trips in the region, satisfaction, and loyalty.

Table 4. Cluster analysis in relation to motivations.

	1 (n = 76)	2 (n = 70)	3 (n = 41)	4 (n = 18)	p-Value
Motivation factors					
Ethical immersion	6.06	5.75	3.02	6.35	0.00
Inner peace and escape	2.89	5.61	2.15	4.98	0.00
Rural nature and heritage	4.66	5.38	2.56	5.28	0.00
New experiences	3.49	4.75	2.21	2.58	0.00
Satisfaction and loyalty					
Global satisfaction	6.71	6.59	6.39	6.78	0.00
Visiting the Costa da Morte was better than expected.	5.67	5.80	3.39	6.00	0.00
If I had to make this decision again, I would make the same choice.	6.17	6.41	3.83	6.61	0.00
I will recommend this visit to my family and friends.	6.45	6.63	4.02	6.83	0.00
I will visit the region again in the future.	6.34	6.36	3.88	6.67	0.00
I will recommend the parador to my family and friends.	6.47	6.56	3.98	6.78	0.00
Number of visits to other municipalities in the region during the stay					
	4.86	3.87	2.24	5.67	0.00
Average daily expenditure (EUR)					
	162.3	144.5	132.2	162.1	0.07
Share of spending in municipalities other than the primary destination (%)					
	36.6	32.5	24.6	39.7	0.00

Source: authors' own.

Table 5. Sociodemographic profile clusters.

	Cluster 1 (Responsible Cultural Tourists)	Cluster 2 (Mindful Rural Escapists)	Cluster 3 (Low- Involvement Tourists)	Cluster 4 (Sustainable Rural Explorers)	Total	χ2 (α)
* Age						
Under 40 years	22.4	44.3	24.4	27.8	30.7	10.83 (0.03)
40–60 years	44.7	34.3	39.0	50.0	40.5	
60 or more years	32.9	21.4	36.6	22.2	28.8	
Gender						
Female	61.8	47.1	53.7	66.7	55.6	4.18 (0.24)
Male	38.2	52.9	46.3	33.3	44.4	
Education						
Below university level	19.7	21.4	17.1	5.6	18.5	3.23 (0.78)
University degree	47.4	42.9	46.3	61.1	46.8	
Postgraduate education	32.9	35.7	36.6	33.3	34.6	
Occupation						
Self-employed	48.7	64.3	61.0	72.2	58.5	8.45 (0.20)
Employee	21.1	10.0	22.0	11.1	16.6	
Other	30.3	25.7	17.1	16.7	24.9	

Table 5. *Cont.*

	Cluster 1 (Responsible Cultural Tourists)	Cluster 2 (Mindful Rural Escapists)	Cluster 3 (Low- Involvement Tourists)	Cluster 4 (Sustainable Rural Explorers)	Total	χ2 (α)
Income (EUR/month)						
<1800	17.1	31.4	14.6	11.1	21.0	8.88 (0.06)
1800–3000	40.8	41.4	48.8	50.0	43.4	
>3000	42.1	27.2	36.6	38.9	35.6	
Tourist trips per year						
Once or twice	15.8	28.6	26.8	22.2	22.9	5.03 (0.83)
Three times	27.6	28.6	24.4	33.3	27.8	
Four times	22.4	17.1	22.0	16.7	20.0	
Five times	34.2	25.7	26.8	27.8	29.3	
* Average daily expenditure (EUR)						
<100	25.0	35.7	26.8	11.1	27.8	18.61 (0.02)
100–149	21.1	15.7	41.5	33.3	24.4	
150–159	23.7	27.1	24.4	33.3	25.9	
>200	30.3	21.4	7.3	22.2	22.0	

* $p < 0.05$. Source: authors' own.

Cluster 1 is the largest in the sample and comprises tourists primarily motivated by the pursuit of tranquility, personal wellbeing, and authentic engagement with the destination. Their travel behavior is strongly aligned with the core principles of slow tourism, prioritizing an unhurried pace of travel, connection with the local way of life, and respectful immersion in local culture and customs. In addition to showing a clear preference for consuming locally produced goods and services, these tourists are willing to pay more for such products, reinforcing their commitment to socially and economically sustainable tourism. They also express a readiness to use responsible transport options, further reflecting their environmental awareness. For these reasons, the group was labelled “responsible cultural tourists”, reflecting their ethically driven, low-impact travel style rooted in cultural immersion, sustainability, and place-based values. Regarding their sociodemographic characteristics, this group comprises the tourists with the highest income levels (42.1% reported a monthly income exceeding EUR 3000). They are also the most frequent travelers, taking more leisure trips over the course of the year than the other clusters.

Cluster 2 is the second largest, made up of tourists seeking a break from the pressures of daily life in peaceful, uncrowded, and rural destinations. Their motivations reveal a desire for personal wellbeing, mental recovery, and emotional disconnection from urban routines. They also show a mindful attitude toward tourism practices, such as supporting the consumption of local products and avoiding over-touristed areas. This conscious and reflective approach to travel, combined with a preference for rural environments in order to get away from the pressures of working life and daily routines, supports the label “mindful rural escapists”. They are young tourists (44.3% are under 40), with lower incomes than the other groups and who are eager to enjoy new experiences as tourists.

Cluster 3 includes tourists who exhibit consistently low levels of motivation, satisfaction, and loyalty in relation to their travel experience. Within the context of their generally lower scores, this group seeks local produce, personal revitalization, and self-enrichment. It comprises older adults seeking rest and relaxation in a peaceful area. They are eager to enjoy their stay at the parador and the local gastronomy, but are less inclined to take part in more active and participatory forms of tourism. Indeed, their limited emotional involvement and weak motivational profile suggest a passive or utilitarian approach to

travel. For this reason, we labeled this segment “low-involvement tourists”, reflecting a low-commitment, low-engagement tourist profile with minimal connection to the destination beyond basic participation.

Cluster 4 represents a group of tourists who, while sharing core values associated with slow tourism (such as ethical engagement, local consumption, and cultural immersion), demonstrate a distinct inclination towards experiential interaction with natural and rural environments. Their travel motivations are essentially outdoor activities, nature walks, and visits to uncrowded, rural areas. This profile reflects a deeper ecological sensitivity and a desire for meaningful, low-impact tourism practices. Accordingly, the segment was defined as “Sustainable rural explorers”, highlighting their dual orientation toward sustainability and active, place-based experiences in nature. From a sociodemographic perspective, and in comparison with the other groups, this segment is characterized by a higher proportion of women, self-employed individuals, and higher income levels.

As mentioned previously, our analysis also revealed significant differences in the tourist-based behavior of the various groups. As Table 4 shows, group 4 members report the highest overall satisfaction with the destination, with an average rating of 6.8 on a 1 to 7 scale, followed by group 1. Group 4 also shows the highest expectation disconfirmation, rating the statement “Visiting the Costa da Morte was better than expected” with a score of 6.0 and “If I had to make this decision again, I would make the same choice” with 6.6. These two items are also rated highly by groups 1 and 2. In contrast, group 3 members give both expectation disconfirmation items a score of less than 4. Group 4 also gives the highest scores to the two items used to measure destination loyalty (“I will recommend this visit to my family and friends” and “I will visit the region again in the future”) and to the item for loyalty to the parador (“I will recommend the parador to my family and friends”). Similarly, groups 1 and 2 show a high level of attitudinal loyalty, while group 3 shows the lowest.

3.3. The Multiplier Effect of the Parador Costa da Morte for the Region

Guests staying at the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte visit other towns and villages and engage in other tourism activities, which generate expenditure and have a multiplier effect. Only 4% of those surveyed stayed in Muxía, the municipality where the parador is located, compared with 96% who reported that they had visited other localities in the region. Indeed, more than 70% of the tourists stated that they had visited two or more localities in the area. On average, tourists visited four municipalities while staying at the parador.

Tourists staying at the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte visited various municipalities in the region, travelling distances of more than 60 or 70 km, as shown in Figure 3. The three most visited municipalities were Fisterra, Camariñas, and Dumbría, which offer a series of tourist attractions. Fisterra (Finisterre) stands out as the most emblematic destination: Traditionally considered to be the “end of the world”, today it is also known as the final stage of a popular extension of the Camino de Santiago. Its spiritual symbolism, as well as the magnificent Atlantic landscapes, sheer cliffs, and the iconic Cape Finisterre lighthouse, contribute to its prominence. Recent years have seen significant growth in visitor numbers, driven by both pilgrimage-related and nature-based tourism. Camariñas is another key destination, valued for its scenic coastal setting and deeply rooted cultural heritage. The presence of the Cabo Vilán lighthouse and the traditional lace-making industry (*encaixe*) enhances its cultural appeal. Historical landmarks such as the HMS Serpent shipwreck site and the “English Cemetery” further add to the town’s maritime identity and heritage. In Dumbría, the Ézaro waterfall is a unique natural attraction. As the only waterfall in continental Europe where a river flows directly into the sea, it is a rare hydrological phe-

nomenon. Its accessibility, scenic infrastructure, and seasonal lighting displays have made it a focal point for nature-based tourism. All three municipalities play a key role in the diversification and sustainable development of rural and coastal tourism in Galicia.

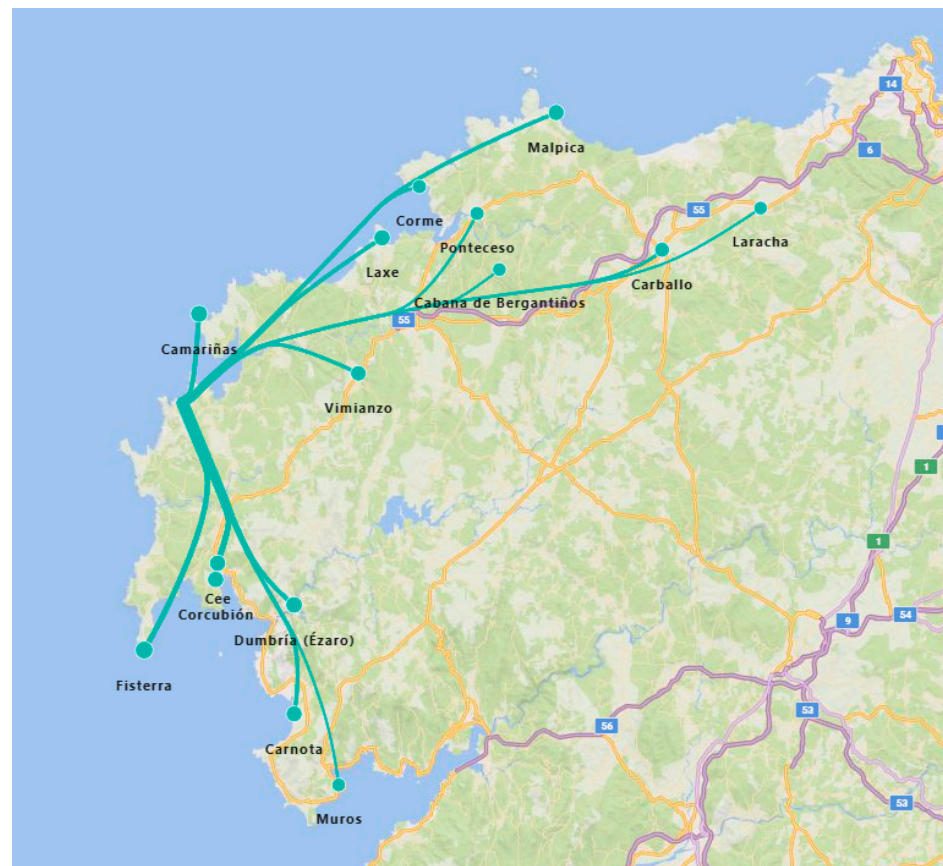


Figure 3. Travel patterns within the region of tourists staying at the Parador Costa da Morte. Source: authors' own using Power BI.

Forty-seven percent of respondents reported that spending money in locations other than the main destination accounted for more than 25% of their total expenditure, and 15% indicated that it exceeded 50%. As shown in Table 4, there are also notable differences in tourist behavior depending on motivational profile. Tourists from groups 1 and 4—“responsible cultural tourists” and “sustainable rural explorers,” respectively—have the greatest economic impact on the region. On average, they visit more municipalities and report higher daily expenditure, allocating a greater proportion of that spending to municipalities other than the main destination, thereby generating a greater multiplier effect. Conversely, the preference of group 3 tourists for a less active form of tourism is reflected in fewer trips and a lower percentage of spending on destinations other than the main one. They also reported lower average spending overall, which tends to be centered essentially on travel to the destination and accommodation.

Our analysis of the official statistics suggests that the construction of the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte radically changed the hotel supply of both the municipality and the wider region. It is the only four-star establishment in the area, and the highest in terms of category. With 131 beds, it accounts for more than 62% of Muxía’s hotel capacity and nearly 7% of the region’s hotel offering, as shown in Table 6 [66]. In addition to this significant quantitative change, the opening of the hotel in 2020 also represented a major qualitative leap in the region’s accommodation options, which had previously been dominated almost exclusively by lower-category hotels.

Table 6. Number of hotels and beds, 2025.

	Muxía		Costa da Morte	
	No.	Beds	No.	Beds
1-star hotels	2	67	14	321
2-star hotels	1	12	26	818
3-star hotel			13	658
4-star hotels (Parador Costa da Morte)	1	131	1	131
TOTAL	4	210	54	1928
% Parador		62.4%		6.8%

Source: [66]. Authors' own.

The opening of the Parador Costa da Morte also had a significant impact on tourism demand in the region. Tourism in the municipality recovered more quickly than in the province as a whole following the COVID-19 health emergency. Tourist numbers for Muxía in 2021 were 57.1% higher than in 2019, prior to the pandemic [67], compared to a drop of almost 21% in the province of A Coruña overall during the same period. Furthermore, tourism growth in Muxía over the last five years has been substantially higher than in the rest of the province. On average, tourist numbers in Muxía grew by nearly 23% annually between 2019 and 2024, a figure far above the provincial average of 3.1%. Further details of this evolution and the corresponding results can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7. Tourists.

	Muxía	Province of A Coruña	Muxía/A Coruña Prov. (%)
2019	8037	2,761,487	0.29
2020	5778	1,576,838	0.37
2021	12,623	2,190,561	0.58
2022	13,262	2,571,590	0.52
2023	20,712	3,148,696	0.66
2024	22,448	3,211,399	0.70
Var. 2021/19	57.1	−20.7	
Var. 2022/19	65.0	−6.9	
Mean var. (2019–2024)	22.8	3.1	

Ref. [67] provides a detailed breakdown by municipalities since July 2019, and therefore the table includes details of tourists registered between months [7–12] each year. Source: authors' own based on data from Ref. [67].

4. Discussion

Tourism is regarded as a driver for economic activity, particularly in rural areas where primary sector activities have gradually declined. The fall in economic vitality has also led to a demographic downturn, leaving rural areas facing aging and depopulation. As a result, public institutions at varying levels (supranational, national, regional, and local) have promoted tourism as a way of stimulating economic, social, and demographic development [68].

The European Union has allocated significant funding to rural development, and programs such as LEADER have funded numerous tourism-related projects in Europe [69,70]. In Spain, Paradores de Turismo de España has also promoted hospitality industry projects to leverage the country's cultural or architectural heritage and revitalize depressed areas [6,7]. The opening of the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte was a strategic response to

the *Prestige* oil spill, designed to foster economic recovery and promote sustainable tourism in an environmentally and culturally sensitive coastal area [71].

Official statistics [67] show that the opening of the new parador significantly changed the area's tourist supply and demand. Our empirical research into tourist motivation and behavior also highlights the impact this state-owned hotel has had on the region, evidencing the broad range of motivations that attract visitors to the region. Specifically, we have identified four motivation factors that have enabled us to classify the tourists into four groups.

Generally speaking, the various groups display motivations aligned with the profile of responsible tourists interested in the local culture and gastronomy. However, we also identified a more passive group ("low-involvement tourists") who are less committed to the destination, and whose principal interest resides in staying in quality accommodation in a quiet destination and enjoying the gastronomy.

As for the impacts on the destination, two profiles—"responsible cultural tourists" (group 1) and "sustainable rural explorers" (group 4)—generate the greatest economic spillover effects by visiting more locations in the region and spending more in municipalities other than the main destination. These two groups demonstrate a strong preference for consuming local products and are willing to pay more to acquire them. They also seek actively to engage with local customs. These findings are consistent with previous studies such as Ref. [49], which identified a profile labeled "Active Visitors" who showed a greater desire to participate in cultural activities in rural areas and interact with local residents. This segment also tended to purchase more local products. Similar conclusions were reached by Ref. [72], who concluded that tourists visiting rural areas in northern Portugal for gastronomic reasons reported a higher daily expenditure. Tourists in group 4 ("sustainable rural explorers"), who are highly motivated by the search for "peace and tranquility" and "personal revitalization and self-enrichment" (6.83/7), also report the highest levels of satisfaction and loyalty to the destination. These findings are aligned with Ref. [73], who found that wellbeing had the greatest impact on satisfaction and loyalty among rural tourists.

The profile we termed "mindful rural escapists" (group 2) is made up of younger tourists with lower income levels who seek to escape work-related stress, enjoy new experiences, and discover new things when traveling for leisure purposes. While this group engages with the destination, they tend to visit fewer additional municipalities and spend less outside the main destination. Nonetheless, in general terms, they score relatively high across most motivation items. These results are in line with Ref. [50], who identified a profile labeled "Excitement Seekers", as well as with Refs. [39,74,75], who described profiles that valued multiple experiences, awarding high scores across various motivation dimensions. These segments were termed "The Want-it-All Cluster" by Ref. [74] and "Multiple Experience Seekers" by Refs. [39,75]. Following Ref. [75], the "Mindful Rural Escapists" identified in our study reported high satisfaction with the destination and expressed a strong intention to recommend it and return.

Despite reporting a similar average daily expenditure as groups 1 and 4, the "low-involvement tourists" of group 3 travel less around the region, centering their expenditure on the main destination. This group exhibits low motivation in all four factors, and their spillover effect on the territory is therefore lower. Various tourist segmentation studies conducted in rural areas have identified tourist groups that share these characteristics. Ref. [74] used the term "Passive tourists" to define a group with low motivation levels. Likewise, the study by Ref. [49] referred to a group of tourists that undertake a limited number of activities in rural areas as "Passive nature observers". More recently, Ref. [39]

identified “Urbanists”: a group of tourists that displayed limited interaction with rural areas and, as in the case of our study, preferred to stay in quality accommodation.

The existence of state-led tourism infrastructure, such as the Parador Costa da Morte, can provide a significant advantage to regions that may otherwise struggle to attract private investment or develop high-quality tourism offerings. In structurally disadvantaged rural areas, these public initiatives help correct market failures and redirect tourism flows toward less saturated destinations. This has important implications within the broader European context, and particularly in Spain, where tourism accounted for over 12% of the GDP in 2023 [76], and where overtourism has become an increasing concern in popular urban and coastal destinations [77,78]. In this regard, public-sector interventions in peripheral rural areas may serve as a mechanism to redistribute tourism more evenly, reduce pressure on overcrowded sites, and offer visitors alternative, more sustainable experiences rooted in local culture and nature.

5. Conclusions

Our study analyzes the effects of the opening of a state-owned parador in a peripheral rural region with a per capita income below the average for the province, the autonomous community, and Spain as a whole. These effects are examined through statistical data on tourism supply and demand in the region, as well as an empirical analysis of the behavior of tourists staying at the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte.

The opening of the parador has clearly brought about far-reaching changes to the supply and demand for tourism in the area. In terms of supply, the impact has been both quantitative and qualitative. On the one hand, the parador accounts for more than 60% of the hotel beds available in the municipality and nearly 7% of the total hotel capacity in the region. On the other hand, it is the only four-star accommodation in the area, thereby significantly upgrading the quality of the regional tourism supply. As for tourist demand, since the opening of the parador five years ago, the municipality of Muxía has doubled its share of tourism in the province of A Coruña, with an average annual growth rate of 23% between 2019 and 2024, far exceeding the average for the province overall.

Our empirical study also confirms that the Parador Costa da Morte has a multiplier effect for the region as a whole, evidenced by the mobility patterns and spending behavior of its guests in neighboring municipalities. Most visitors staying at the parador travel to other locations in the area, visiting on average four different municipalities and allocating approximately one-third of their total travel budget to these additional destinations. These dynamics underpin the parador’s role as a driver of territorial development, promoting a more equitable distribution of tourism spending and greater integration of the region’s overall offering.

The analysis of tourist motivations and behavior reveals significant differences in the impact generated by different visitor profiles. Those most engaged with local heritage, culture, and gastronomy contribute most to regional development, as they are more likely to travel within the area and consume in other municipalities. In contrast, less engaged tourists display more passive behavior, limiting both their mobility and their spending. These findings open up new opportunities for the design of tourism products and targeted marketing strategies aimed at strengthening visitor segments that generate the greatest economic and social benefits for the region.

6. Recommendations and Limitations

The findings of this study reveal a significant diversity in the motivations of tourists staying at the Parador de Turismo Costa da Morte. Particularly worthy of note are those related to the consumption of local products and the appreciation of the region’s cultural

and environmental heritage. This is especially relevant, as it confirms the potential of local and natural resources as drivers of sustainable, endogenous development. Specifically, tourists motivated by a desire for ethical engagement with the destination and enjoyment of the rural natural heritage were found to be the most satisfied and loyal. The groups identified on the basis of these motivations also showed a greater propensity to spend in other municipalities in the region, which is of interest from a tourism management perspective.

In terms of public policies, short-term measures should prioritize strengthening promotion and marketing strategies that specifically target tourists motivated by slow, responsible tourism and an appreciation for cultural authenticity and nature. These efforts can leverage the region's strategic advantage, as reflected in the general tourist profile. Additionally, designing experience-based tourism products, such as gastronomic routes featuring local produce, community participation activities, and ecotourism or interpretive hiking experiences, will help attract and satisfy these segments.

In the long term, fostering community-based initiatives that encourage local involvement in tourism development is essential to reinforcing cultural identity and promoting sustainable growth. Public sector actors should support these efforts by investing in infrastructure and policies that encourage responsible tourism. At the same time, the private sector can contribute by creating and enhancing tailored offerings aligned with these motivations. Together, these initiatives are expected to increase visitor satisfaction and loyalty while contributing meaningfully to the region's economic and sociocultural sustainability, ensuring that tourism development benefits both tourists and local communities.

As for the limitations of our study, it must be stated that the fieldwork was localized and limited to tourists staying at the parador. Since the data were collected through a voluntary self-administered questionnaire focused on the parador, future studies should aim to include a more representative sample of tourists by extending the scope to other types of accommodation and incorporating the perspectives of key local stakeholders. Additionally, expanding the analysis to other peripheral coastal destinations would allow for broader comparisons and enhance the external validity of the findings. Finally, although there is evidence of the parador's multiplier effect, based on guests' visits and spending in other places, our study did not include a comprehensive analysis of the economic and socio-cultural impact. Future studies should therefore apply more precise and thorough methodologies capable of integrally assessing the impacts of the parador on the region in economic, social, and cultural terms.

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Informed Consent Statement: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author due to containing private participant information, which requires controlled access to protect confidentiality.

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